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'The terrible twos': Gaining control in the nursery?

Lesley-Anne Gallacher

Abstract: 'The terrible twos' are often described as a time of 'gaining control', usually thought of as adults asserting control over children, who learn to control themselves. However, toddlerhood is as much about children learning to take control for themselves. This paper is an attempt to detail something of the social geography in the toddler room of a Scottish nursery, considering both styles of adult control and the ways in which toddlers attempt to appropriate and reconfigure space and time for themselves. That is, the ways in which space and time are negotiated in the course of day-to-day nursery life.

Keywords: Early childhood; toddlers; childcare; control; space.

Introduction: 'Pre-social' children and the institution of the nursery?

While there has been increasing interest in the social geographies of childhood in recent years (see, for example, Valentine, 1997a, 1997b; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a; McKendrick *et al.*, 2000a, 2000b; Smith and Barker, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), early childhood has been somewhat neglected, perhaps due to 'our' general underestimation of the abilities and social competence of young children and the perceived methodological difficulties in engaging with them, despite the growing literature on research with young children (see Corsaro, 1997; Cousins, 1999; Clark and Moss, 2001; Lancaster and Broadbent, 2003). Popular terms for young children imply that they are insufficient — 'pre-school children', 'under-fives', 'under-threes' — or incapable — 'toddlers' — (Daniel and Ivatts, 1998). As a result, early childhood is placed in deficit even in terms of childhood, which is already defined as lacking (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). Piagetian developmental psychology formalises the insufficiency of childhood in a series of hierarchical stages of intellectual development, such that a child's 'completeness' is determined by their biological age (see Piaget, 1959). By linking social development to cognitive development young children (and toddlers in particular) are understood as fundamentally egocentric, incompetent and irrational, yet to develop the ability to 'decentre' crucial to social competence.¹

Piaget's stage model of development has been subject to numerous criticisms over the years. Donaldson (1978) suggested that Piaget based his model on flawed experiments that do not make 'human sense' to young children, causing him seriously to underestimate their abilities.

¹ Social competence is not a single attribute, but a group of competencies which allow individuals to integrate thinking, feeling and behaviour to achieve social tasks and outcomes. Social competence is regarded as underlain by a number of skills, including: appreciation of other points of view; ability to interpret emotional states and behaviour in others; considered, rather than impulsive, responses to social situations; and altering behaviour to accommodate others (The Scottish Office, 1998). Less prescriptive definitions of social competence may be more useful, such as simply successful social functioning with peers (Gettinger *et al.*, 1992).

Thus, Donaldson argued that their inability to perform Piaget's tasks was due neither to egocentricity nor to lack of logical skills, but to the difficulties of young children had in understanding or abstracting from what they had been asked to do. This view has been reinforced by studies describing peer group interaction and social understanding in supposedly 'pre-social' children (Brenner and Meuller, 1982; Dunn, 1988; Gross, 1989; Honig and Thomson, 1994; Goncu, 2000, for example). More broadly, Piagetian developmental psychology has been criticised for its deterministic and universal view of childhood in that it creates a 'gold standard' normal developmental sequence against which all children can, and should, be measured (James *et al.*, 1998). The influence of post-structuralism has led some developmental psychologists to move away from Piagetian ideas, emphasising instead the myriad cultural and individual influences on development; its inherent plasticity (Walkerdine, 1984, 1988; Burman, 1994; Aitken and Herman, 1997). Nevertheless, developmental stage theory – which positions very young children as egocentrically 'pre-social' – continues to shape common sense understandings of the capabilities of young children and to inform childcare/early educational policy and practice.

As a result, early childhood is viewed as largely socially inconsequential, other than as a preparatory stage for adulthood. UK social policy positions young children firmly within the family, excessively focusing on adult concerns and interests (Daniel and Ivatts, 1998). Accordingly, the needs and experiences of young children tend to be obscured behind those of their adult carers. This is reflected in much of the existing geographical literature which has focused on *childcare* rather than young children in themselves (see England, 1996; Holloway, 1998; Aitken, 2000). Holloway and Valentine (2000b) suggest that the spatiality of childhood may be explored through research about the *care* of 'preschool' children and older children's use of public space. The growing institutionalisation and commercialisation of childhood has been greeted with suspicion (McKendrick *et al.*, 2000a, 2000b; Smith and Barker, 2001). Concerns have been raised about the eradication of 'wild' spaces where children can be free to do as they please as childhood spaces become increasingly formalised, indeed 'institutionalised' (Ward, 1978). Institutional childcare can be viewed as part of this move towards increasingly disciplined childhoods and children.

However, to view day nurseries, and other institutions for early childhood, purely as incidences of adult domination is to view young children as incidental and to deny any notion of agency in early childhood. Toddlers are *not* 'pre-social', they are 'neither too egocentric nor too socially unskilled to establish joint goals and to adjust their behaviour in the service of these goals' (Brownell and Carriger, 2000). As such, I attempt to detail something of the truly *social* micro-geography of the toddler room in a nursery. I consider the toddler room firstly as a site of control, an adult space for ordering children, particularly looking at ideas from Foucault (1991, English edition first published in 1977) and Goffman (1968). I then look at the ways in which toddlers (attempt to) appropriate and reconfigure space in the toddler room for themselves, giving a flavour of the 'underlife' (Goffman, 1968) of the nursery. In doing so, I attempt to draw out the spatialisations in Corsaro's work on peer cultures in American and Italian preschools (1997). Finally, I reflect upon the interdependence and entanglement of these two aspects of nursery life as reflected in the nature of space in the toddler room.

This paper relates to fieldwork carried out in a large private nursery in East Renfrewshire, Scotland. This nursery can be understood as both an institutional and a commercial space, catering for children from six weeks to twelve years old. The nursery was organised in to a number of rooms and areas in which children were cared for in age-defined groups structured to conform to and meet the needs of specific Piagetian stages. I studied the 'late-toddler' stage room, which was designed to cater for children from approximately two to three years old, some of whom could be there for almost a year and a half before moving on to the 'pre-school' rooms.

At the time of my study the children in the room were aged between 22 and 31 months. The toddler room was staffed by a mixture of qualified and trainee nursery nurses and assistants. There could be up to 45 children in the room at any one time with a ratio of at least one adult to every five children.

I carried out my research by participant observation in a 'non-authoritarian adult' role (Corsaro, 1997; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000), attempting to work with 'generational' issues—the differences between adults and children—rather than trying to minimise them (Mayall, 2000). My attempts to appear as an atypical, less powerful adult allowed me to glimpse elements of the peer culture from which I might otherwise have been excluded. This research role also allowed me to ask nursery staff questions, even when the answer may have seemed obvious to them, and encouraged them to explain things to me informally in the course of day-to-day nursery life. In fact, this served as a useful reinforcement of my research role in that it encouraged the children to relate to me in different ways. They were often interested in shaping the course of my research: they would draw my attention to certain activities, usually by physically pulling at me and add their ideas directly into my notebook, often obscuring my own attempts at note taking in the process. My performance in this role was complicated somewhat by the presence of my son, Aidan, in the room.² However, this had a largely positive effect; I was not a stranger but 'Aidan's mummy', and therefore not in charge of the other children. I explained to Aidan that although I was (supposedly) in charge at home, the 'ladies' were in charge in the nursery so everyone (including me) had to do what they said. He found it relatively easy to adapt to this distinction and even began to enjoy the changed power differential between us at nursery.

Gaining control

Toddlerhood or 'the terrible twos' is widely perceived as a time of gaining control as this quote from a popular childcare manual suggests:

For [adults], toddlerhood is a time of introducing controls, guiding gently, setting limits, avoiding confrontation and being one hundred per cent firm when needed. For the children, toddlerhood is about control—learning to control their bodies and behaviour. (Green, 2000, p. 12)

Thus, toddlerhood is about adults taking control and children learning self-control in line with adult expectations.³ In this light, the nursery can be understood as a space for 'ordering' children, making use of Foucauldian disciplinary technologies (Walkerdine, 1984, 1988, Tobin, 1995; Canella, 1997, 1999; Aitken, 2001). Foucault (1991) describes a range of spatialised disciplinary practices which enable the processes of panopticism to take effect. Panopticism subjects individuals to potentially constant hierarchical surveillance and the action of normalising judgement. This causes them to internalise 'the gaze' and exercise self-discipline and self-surveillance, conforming to behavioural norms. Panopticism is implicit in the methods used by nursery staff (Canella, 1997, 1999) who attempt to create 'ordered' children ('docile bodies' in Foucault's terms) who will eventually become 'good moral citizens' (Aitken, 2001).

² In the empirical data discussed later Aidan's name has been changed, as have the names of all other participants in this study.

³ This appears to endorse the sociability of toddlers, in that it implies that they possess some kind of social reflexivity. However, it turns out to be a case of children passively internalising adult discipline. Green details a number of parenting techniques for *toddler taming* based in behaviourist theories of classical and operant conditioning (see Corsaro, 1997; MacNaughton, 2003). These allow parents to manipulate their children and *train* them to behave in 'acceptable' ways. In particular, Green notes the importance of toilet training—an adult-led process of disciplining the child's body to conform to societal norms (Aitken, 2001).

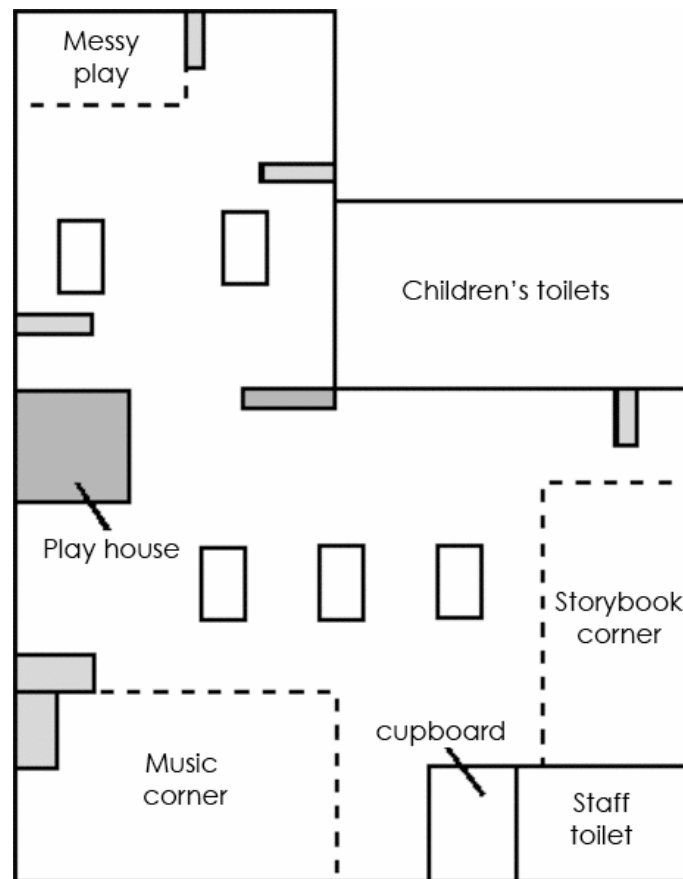


Figure 1. Basic plan of the toddler room. The dotted lines mark the edge of each designated area in the room. Areas shaded grey indicate something that restricts the view of the room. The small storage units (light grey) restrict the view less than the taller unit and the play house (darker grey). The rectangular tables can be moved around the room to suit various activities.

This all sounds very sinister and not at all in line with the ethos of play in early childhood education and care, yet the 'behaviour'-modifying 'art of distributions' (Foucault, 1991, p. 141) was practiced in the (purpose-built) nursery that I studied. Children were partitioned according to age, so that each stage had exclusive use of (at least one) indoor and outdoor area. The use of shared areas, like the gym and 'Wonderland',⁴ was timetabled to ensure that they were only used by a single stage at a time. These areas were what Foucault terms 'functional sites' in that they have specific designated uses (1991, pp. 143-144). In the nursery some functional sites like the gym, 'Wonderland' and the kitchens had concrete physical boundaries (walls and doors), while the boundaries of areas within the toddler room were more subtly defined. Figure 1 indicates the major functional sites in the toddler room. The music corner and storybook corner were carpeted areas with well defined boundaries while the limits of the messy play area were unmarked and largely a matter of convention. The integrity of these functional sites was firmly maintained by staff. For example, storybook corner was designated as a quiet, restful area for reading, naps and other peaceful activities. The staff attempted to put an end to any activity in this area that did not conform to this ethos, as the following extract from my field diary shows:⁵

⁴ Wonderland is a sensory experience room.

⁵ Field diary extracts have been indented and italicised in the text.

Blair, Liam and Cameron were sitting on top of Lewis on the sleep mats in storybook corner, trying to squash him. HEATHER⁶ came over and sent them away to do something else, saying, 'This is not a sleep mat activity!'

This incident signals another aspect of control in the toddler room: surveillance. Figure 1 indicates physical structures that interrupted the panoptic structure of the toddler room. In addition to this, views across the room were restricted by its physical shape. To compensate for this toddler room staff would position themselves around the room to ensure that the entire area was under surveillance, although the play house remained problematic in this respect. The shape of the toddler room was advantageous at nap time when the children were divided into two groups; those who were taking a nap and those who were not. Each group was positioned so that they could not see the other group, minimising the risk that they would disturb each other. The spatial layout of the toddler room and the function of particular areas, however, did not remain fixed; it altered throughout the day according to the nursery routine. As in most nurseries, the toddler room day was divided into various 'times' named after the activity that took place (King, 1978). This timetable has a disciplinary function (Foucault, 1991) in that it structures and orders children's sense of time (Hartley, 1993) by structuring their activities. The toddler room timetable, however, was both temporal *and spatial*; each 'time' had a distinctive spatial layout, although some arrangements were returned to throughout the day. What follows is an elaboration of the toddler room routine on a 'typical' day (figures 2 to 17). In all diagrams members of staff are depicted by black dots and children by white dots.

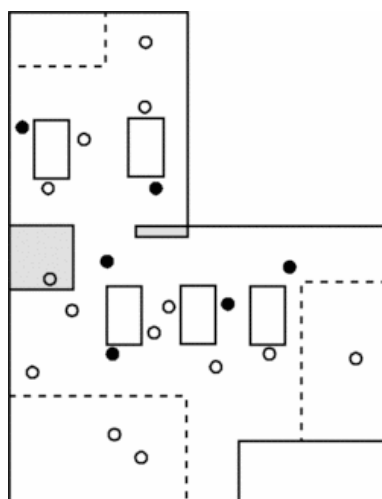


Figure 2. 8.00am. Welcome / table-top toys / free play.

Children are welcomed by a member of staff as they enter the room. Toys have been placed on each of the tables and the children are free to choose what they play with and where⁷.

⁶ Staff names have been capitalised in field diary extracts to distinguish them from the children.

⁷ Truly 'free' play in the nursery is a myth. Children are not free to choose to do *anything*, but to choose from the available, carefully chosen, materials. They must use these materials in ways that are deemed 'appropriate' by the nursery staff. In effect, children are constrained by the disciplinary power of the curriculum (Leatzow *et al.*, 1983; Canella, 1999).

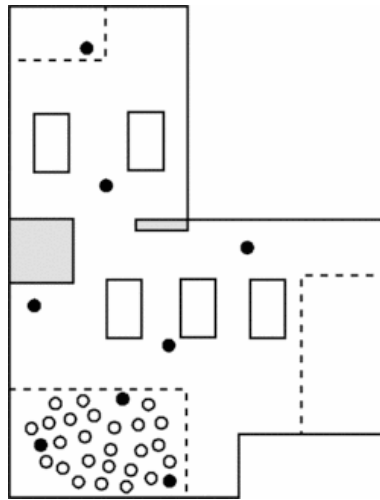


Figure 3. 9.00am. Tidy up / set up.

This is a transitional point in the day. Children are encouraged to help staff tidy up before being taken over to the music corner by some members of staff who improvise an activity. This allows the other staff to finish tidying up and set up group time.

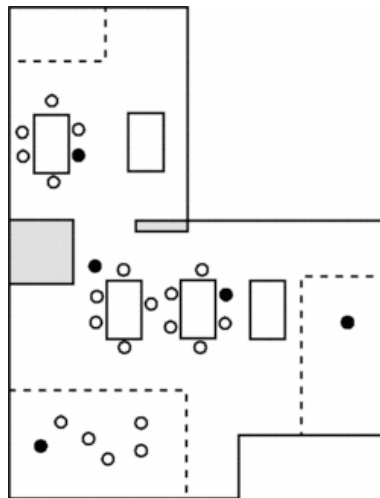


Figure 4. 9.15am. Morning group time.

The children are divided into their groups. Each group does a different activity in a specific area of the nursery (depending on the activity) with their key worker.

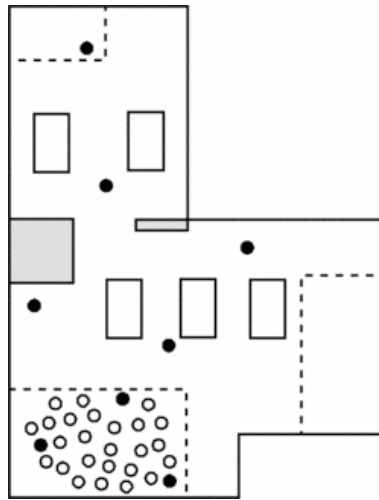


Figure 5. 9.45am. Collective singing.

Some of the staff take the children into the music corner to sing while the rest of the staff tidy up and set up free play and the milk bar.

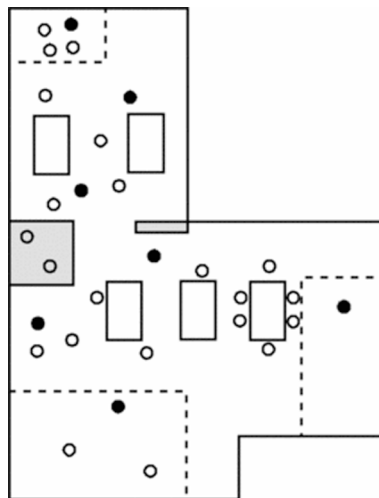


Figure 6. 10.00am. Milk bar / free play / staff breaks.

Toys are placed around the room and children choose from the activities on offer. Activities like easel painting, sand or water play are closely supervised and contained in the messy play area. One of the tables becomes the 'milk bar' and children are called over in small groups for their milk and toast. They must remain seated at the milk bar until they are finished eating and drinking. They are then sent away to play and other children are called over for their toast and milk.

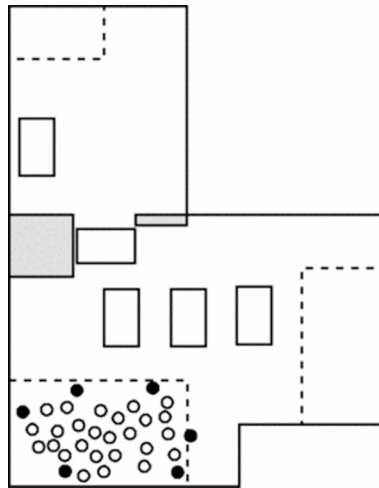


Figure 7. 11.00am. Nappies⁸ / ring games / puppets / sticky kids⁹.

Children begin to help tidy up before being taken into the music corner to do some of the above activities. When the room is tidy and the activity underway the children are called individually into the toilet to have their nappies changed and put a bib on before being sent back to the music corner.

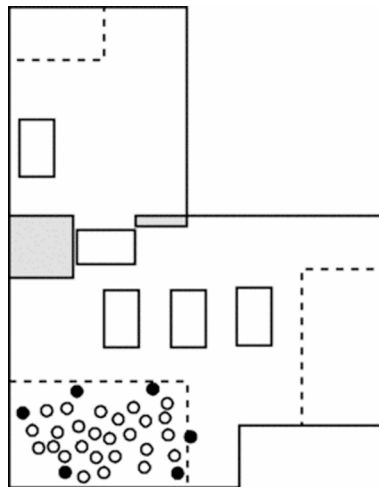


Figure 8. 11.30am. Story time.

A member of staff reads a story to the children in the music corner. Children must stay in the music corner while lunch cools on a trolley beside the play house.

⁸ Nappies were, of course, changed at other times if necessary.

⁹ Sticky kids is a music and movement activity for young children.

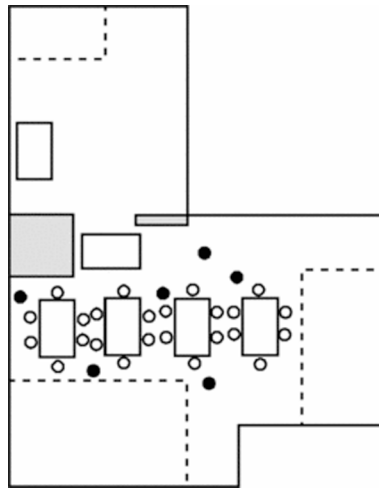


Figure 9. 11.45am. Lunch time.

Children are called individually to sit at the tables for lunch. They must remain in the music corner until their name is called. When all children are seated at the tables lunch is served. One member of staff watches each table and records what each child eats. Children must stay seated until lunchtime is finished. Then the children are sent table by table to the toilet to have their hands and face washed before going either to the sleep mats for a nap or to the top part of the room to play.

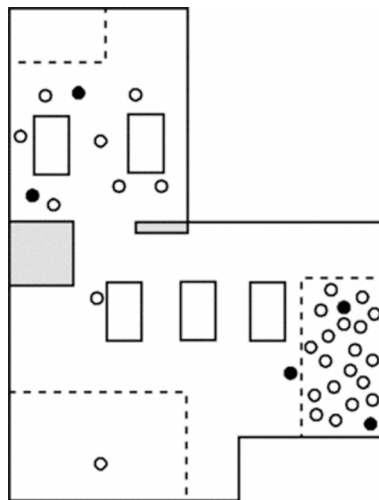


Figure 10. 1.00pm. Nap time / morning children depart / afternoon children arrive.

Children taking naps lie down on the sleep mats in storybook corner with some staff supervising. Max and Louise sleep in their buggies in the music corner, although Louise is moved outside once she falls asleep. All other children must stay in the top part of the room for free play supervised by the rest of the staff. They are not allowed to go past the tall storage unit. 'Morning children' are picked up and 'afternoon children' are dropped off.

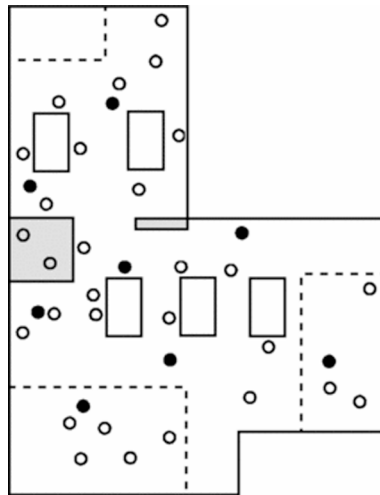


Figure 11. 2.00pm. Free play.

Again, toys are placed around the room and children choose from the available activities.

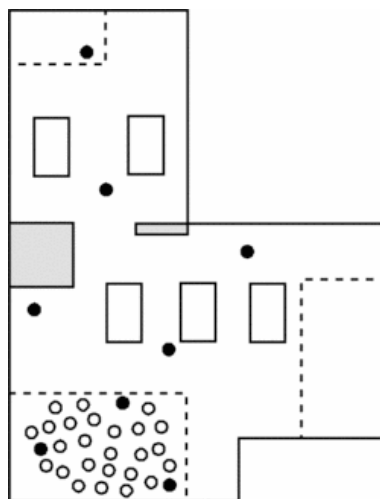


Figure 12. 2.45pm. Tidy up / set up.

Children are, again, encouraged to help tidy up and then taken into the music corner for an improvised activity to allow the staff to finish tidying up and set up group time.

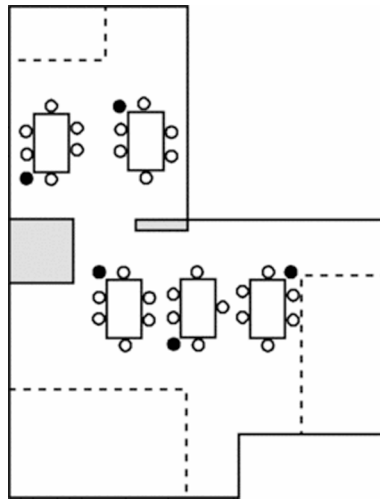


Figure 13. 3.00pm. Afternoon group time.

The children are divided into their groups to do another activity in a specific area of the nursery (depending on the activity) with their key worker.

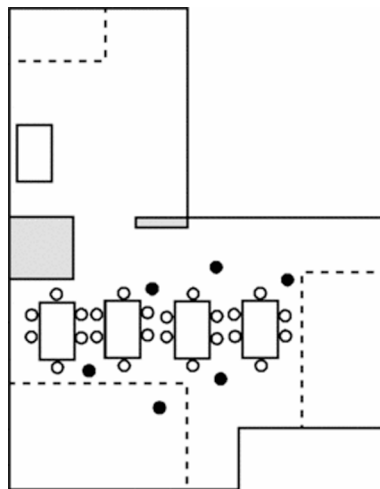


Figure 14. 3.30pm. Snack time.

Children are seated at the tables for snack and they must remain seated until snack time is over.

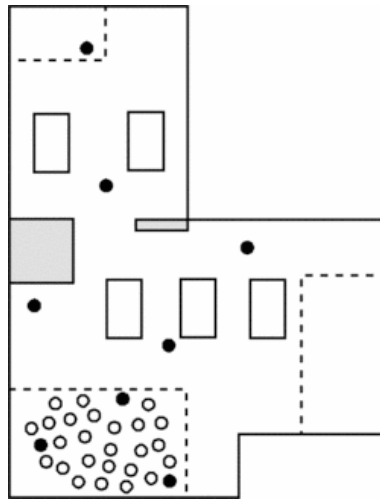


Figure 15. 4.00pm. Nappies / ring games / music / singing.

Children are taken into the music corner for some of the above activities. When the activities are underway they are called individually to the toilet to have their nappy changed before being sent back to sit down.

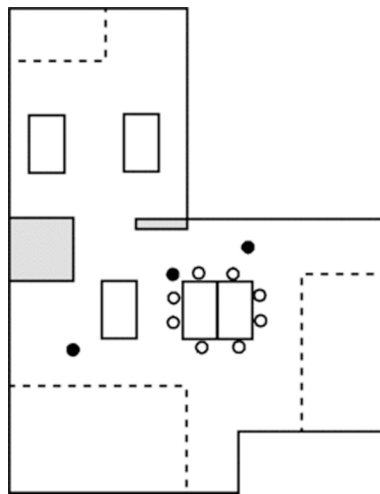


Figure 16. 4.45pm. Evening activities / glueing / paint / playdough.

Children are gradually picked up by carers. Two tables are pushed together and the children sit around them doing quiet activities, including those listed above.

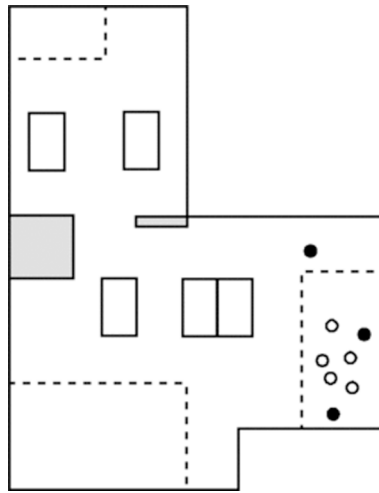


Figure 17. 5.30pm. Relaxing / depart.

Quiet reading or playing in the storybook corner until all children are picked up. The nursery closes at 6 p.m.

In addition to moving tables and children around the room, the toddler room routine involved the creation and maintenance of different boundaries whenever the 'time' changed. As such, toddler room staff had to classify and reclassify space (for the children) throughout the day, changing both the function of sites within the room and their authorised users. Goffman (1968) describes three different classes of institutional space linked to aspects of gaining and maintaining control. In this section, I want to concentrate on two of these categories: 'off-limits'/'out of bounds' spaces and 'surveillance space', which alludes to panopticism. Essentially the distinction is between areas in which children are and are not allowed to be, although use of surveillance space comes with the condition that children abide by the nursery rules and regulations. Classifications were in effect throughout the nursery, designating whole rooms (and gardens) and areas within them. The kitchens and the staff room were always off-limits to children, while the classification of 'Wonderland' and the gym shifted between off-limits and surveillance space for each age-group according to the timetable. I am most interested, however, in the shifting classifications of space within the toddler room.

The only 'times' when the entire toddler room was designated as surveillance space for all children was during free play (Figures 2, 6, and 11), although the 'milk bar' table remained off-limits to some degree at morning free play (Figure 6). At various points in the day (Figures 3 and 7) all areas in the toddler room except the music corner were out of bounds to the children. This boundary was particularly strictly enforced during story time while lunch cooled down (Figure 7) to prevent the children from burning themselves. Spatial classifications, however, did not always apply equally to all children; they could be individualised to varying degrees. At group time (Figures 4 and 13) space was categorised differently for each group. Thus, the areas into which each child was allowed were determined by the group to which they belonged; as the following incident shows (the groups were given animal names):

At group time NUALA called her Giraffes over to their table and began helping them to put on aprons for painting. Mark tried to join the Giraffes instead of going with his group the Kangaroos, NUALA told him that only Giraffes should be at that table and sent him over to join the right group.

At other times, spatial classifications in the toddler room become more complex. At nap time the room was coded differently according to whether children took naps. Children slept on the mats in storybook corner (or in their buggy¹⁰), otherwise they had to stay in the top part of the room (Figure 10). The staff could alter the classifications that applied to individual children when necessary:

At nap time Charlotte decided she didn't want to sleep. After wriggling about on the sleep mats for a while HEATHER sent her round to play in the top part of the room. Charlotte went round and played with the duplo beside NUALA for a while. She then started walking down towards the music corner where Max was sleeping in his buggy. NUALA called her back telling her she would wake the sleeping children if she went down there.

Charlotte's status was altered from that of a napping child to a non-napping child to stop her waking the other children, this effectively reversed the classifications that applied to her.

The toddler room routine and its classifications, then, were not fixed but could be varied by staff. The routine could also be varied to incorporate special events, like birthday parties. On a child's birthday (or the nursery day closest to it) their parents would bring in a cake and the staff would organise a birthday party snack time with a particular spatial arrangement (Figure 18). Sometimes siblings were brought through to the toddler room from elsewhere in the nursery for the party at parental request.

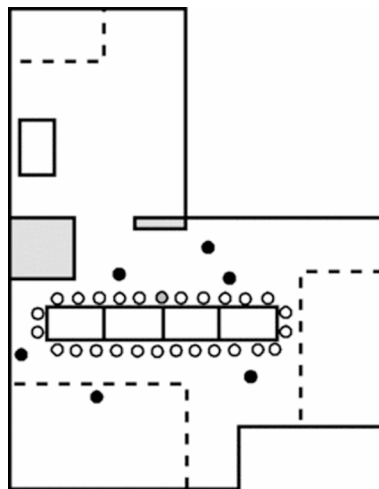


Figure 18. Birthday party snack time. The tables are pushed together to create one long table. The children sit around this table and eat their snack. The birthday child (depicted by the grey dot) sits in the middle of the table.

Styles of control

The shifting boundaries and categorisations in the toddler room had to be continually maintained by the staff, using a variety of styles of control. The more personal term 'styles', unlike 'techniques', 'methods' or 'strategies', alludes to the ways in which different personalities and

¹⁰ In Louise's case this was due to parental request, Max slept in his buggy because he was 'disruptive' on the sleep mats.

dispositions are performed socially in the toddler room.¹¹ Toddler room styles of control were improvised to suit emerging situations and the personalities of both staff and children, and may appear surprisingly sophisticated given 'common sense' assumptions about the capabilities of young children. Staff in the toddler room frequently had to reinforce the processes of Panopticism verbally. Smith and Barker (2000a, 2000b) found that staff in out-of-school clubs attempted to alter the actions and activities of school-age children by reminding them that they were under surveillance. This same style was used in the toddler room with much younger children:

Duncan was throwing toys into the play house. NUALA told him, 'Duncan, Duncan Jones; I'm watching you! That's all I'm saying'.

Often this reminder was enough to persuade the child to stop the transgressive activity in which he/she was engaged:

Blair, Liam and Logan were in the music corner climbing on the empty book bench. SARAH told them not to climb because it is dangerous. They ignored her and continued climbing. SARAH lifted them off the bench and told them to go and play with the toys. Liam and Logan went off to find something else to do but Blair stayed behind and started to climb again. SARAH warned him, I'm watching you. I'm watching you closely Blair Scott!' He continued to climb for a moment but decided against it and went off to play somewhere else.

This is an aspect of a particular style of control. King (1978) argues that early childhood teachers have both 'public' and 'private' voices, used for speaking to whole classes or to individuals. The public voice can be heard in all parts of the room, establishing a kind of teacher/staff omniscience, extending their authority into the panoptic 'blind spots' of the classroom.

The use of styles of control indicates that the children did not automatically internalise the disciplinary structure. It was not enough to position 'bodies in space' (Driver, 1997); toddler room staff needed to promote and to support their disciplinary technologies with some (mild) psychological and emotional manipulation. Styles of control in the toddler room were many and varied, and something of this diversity is suggested by the following extract from my field diary:

The children were in the music corner for a puppet show. They have been asked to sit down so that everyone could see the puppets. Abbie would not sit down so NUALA stopped the show and told Abbie that unless she sat down all the boys and girls would miss out because she would not read the story. Abbie sat back down. Callum, however, was not really interested in the story so he started to walk about. JENNIFER told him to sit down a couple of times before sitting him on her lap and cuddling him.

Here two different styles were used to allow the activity to continue, evoking both positive and negative emotions in the children. Nuala used peer pressure to make Abbie feel guilty and sit down while Jennifer restricted Callum's movement by cuddling him, masking a repressive activity in an emotionally loaded gesture, rewarding him for not moving. Many styles of control used in the toddler room appealed to emotions in this way. Staff often attempted to adjust or encourage children's actions and activities by vocalising their own emotions, explaining to the children how certain actions made them feel:

¹¹ The term 'style' here is used in much the same way as psychologists refer to 'cognitive styles'. Individuals employ unique ways in acquiring new information; they approach experiences in different ways according to their personal characteristics (Morgan, 1999, pp. 130-131).

The children were in the music corner singing songs while group time was being set up. Erin would not sit down and was disturbing the children around her. LUCY told the children that she was 'so pleased' to see them sitting 'nicely'. She identified some of the children by name and commented that they were sitting 'beautifully'. LUCY praised Erin when she finally sat down.

In praising the children who were doing what she wanted Lucy was implying that Erin was not so doing. Erin sat down as she wanted to please Lucy. Staff would also tell a child that their actions made them unhappy:

At snack time Mark was refusing to sit 'properly' at the table and being cheeky to ASHLEY. ASHLEY asked JENNIFER to leave him until last to get a piece of Charlotte's birthday cake. SARAH heard this and told Mark that she was very disappointed and hoped she would not have to tell his mother.

Here, Sarah referred both to her own emotions and to how Mark's parents would feel. In doing so she blurred the boundaries between toddler room and family discipline.

The boundaries between toddler room and family life were permeable in many ways. Nurseries can be described as defined by and structured for their adult users—parents—in that they provide childcare for adult 'clients' (Smith and Barker, 2000b). Many nursery activities were planned to allow details of each child's day to be recorded.¹² This was most obvious at lunch time when each table was watched by a different member of staff who recorded what each child ate. At the end of each day parents were given a run down of their child's day; what he/she had eaten, the toys he/she had played with and any (perceived) discipline problems. Parents also had a more direct influence in the toddler room. They decided when their children would be in the toddler room, whether they were full or part time, what time they would be picked up at and by whom. Some parents also specified special diets or napping arrangements for their children. Sometimes parental choices had unintended consequences in the toddler room. For example, parents often chose to bring in a particular caterpillar-shaped chocolate cake for their child's birthday party. The cake was extremely popular with the children but had become known by staff as 'the dreaded caterpillar cake' because the children would get chocolate all over their hands, face and clothes when they ate it.

A space for children

The toddler room is undoubtedly a site of control, by both staff and parents (among others¹³). However, the variety of styles of control used in the toddler room suggest that children are not passive objects of (child)care who submissively internalise nursery structures and rules. The 'terrible twos' are about control; children are learning to control themselves and to take control for themselves. As such, they are discovering that they can, to some extent, manipulate others and negotiate the use of space to their own ends. The toddler room staff were aware of some level of manipulation by the children, particularly in those children typified as 'manipulative' (King, 1978). However, this does not mean that other children were not manipulative; more subtle attempts at manipulation may have gone unnoticed.

There was a very definite 'underlife' in the toddler room composed of various 'secondary adjustments', or ways of breaking and getting around the rules (Goffman, 1968). These include the use of available equipment and spaces in unauthorised ways ('make-do's') and more

¹² Continually recording children's activities in this way is part of the hierarchical surveillance and normalising judgement of panoptic regimes (Foucault, 1991).

¹³ Nurseries are embedded in wider social life. As such, they are influenced both directly and indirectly by discourses acting at various scales (both spatial and temporal).

elaborate styles of 'working the system'. Perhaps ironically, the routine nature of toddler room life enabled the underlife to emerge and to flourish, as detailed knowledge of a system is required to perform effective secondary adjustments. Corsaro (1997) noted that pre-school children's secondary adjustments often take the form of routines themselves. These can be performed individually, but are often collective and become a highly valued element of the peer culture. Routines are predictable and recurrent while remaining flexible; that is, the social aspects of routines can be varied within the limits of an underlying cognitive 'frame', which is shared by all participants and often adapted from the nursery's 'formal' 'rules' (Goffman, 1974). As such, peer culture routines are easily adapted to take advantage of opportunities that arise in the course of the official routine. Children 'interpretively reproduce' (appropriate from and modify) their own semi-autonomous peer culture worlds and routines, effectively carving them out in, and from, the interstices of 'adult culture' (Corsaro, 1997).

In the toddler room, peer culture routines were most frequent during periods of 'free play', although they could occur at any time, and could involve any child in the room. Some children were more active in this respect and often initiated or elaborated favourite routines. For example, while the children were waiting to be served lunch they would often bang their plates against the table. Usually this would begin with one child (not always the same one) and others would join in. The routine would stop as lunch was served onto the plates. Most peer culture routines in the toddler room began in this opportunistic and imitative way. Trevarthen (2000) suggests that imitative play allows toddlers to negotiate ideas and actions non-verbally. As such, peer culture routines and friendship are closely linked. Young children's notions of friendship are different from adults. Initially 'friends' are adult-designated, other children with whom a child must share his/her toys, according to his/her carers. As such, toddler room staff sometimes used friendship as a style of control:

On the way into the play house Blair pushed Callum away and slammed the door behind him. ASHLEY saw this and took Blair out of the house telling him, 'That's not nice! You've got to share the house with your friends'.

Here Ashley used friendship, a general and malleable concept for children (Corsaro and Rizzo, 1995), to manipulate the children to share and play 'nicely'. However, friendship was not entirely an adult concept, toddler room children were beginning to negotiate and develop their own friendships in their peer culture routines (Corsaro, 1997). Play can be described as beginning as a 'motive' for friendship formation; children become friends because they have opportunities to play together. Play then becomes a context for development and extension of friendships (Avgitidou, 1997). In the toddler room the same groups of children would often return to the same routines day after day. The ongoing relationships formed by participation in these routines allowed the peer culture to continually be elaborated and extended.

I observed a number of simple peer culture routines in the toddler room. The children devised ways of transgressing boundaries, allowing them to get into off-limits space, however vicariously. On warm, sunny days nursery staff liked to take their breaks outside in the toddler room garden, which is next to the staff room, extending the out of bounds staff room classification into the garden. The children would routinely climb on the benches in the music corner to watch them through the window until they were told to 'leave the ladies alone'. Other routines attempted to alter the staff-designated function of spaces. A popular one involved running across the room and jumping on the sleep mats piled up in storybook corner. The children would do this in groups and often extended the play to 'squashing' and pushing each other on the mats (as in an earlier example). This subverted the staff coding of storybook corner.

More complex peer culture routines were often associated with the play house. The small plastic house, with a solid roof, was difficult to see into, particularly when the door and window shutters were closed. It was not intended to be used as a 'home corner' (see Isbell and Exelby, 2001; Curtis and Carter, 2003), but expressly provided as a small, secure, private space where the children could escape the pressures of constantly being on display; a free space—the final category of institutional space in Goffman (1968). However, the children often exploited this status. As such, the play house was the primary site for the creation and extension of underlife routines in the toddler room. The children would frequently sneak items into the play house to play in ways that they could not elsewhere in the toddler room:

Max and Liam were in the play house with the door and the shutters closed. They had brought a pram inside (which is not allowed) and were banging it against the walls and generally being very noisy and boisterous. Charlotte heard them, opened the shutters and looked in. Pretending to be scared, Liam ran away to the far side of the house. After a few moments, Liam went back over to the first window and Charlotte peeked back in again. Liam ran away again laughing. The routine was repeated until LUCY called Liam to have his nappy changed.

The pram incident precipitated a particular type of peer culture routine: approach-avoidance play. Corsaro (1997) views this type of (non-verbal) routine as a fundamental part of early childhood peer cultures. In approach-avoidance play children identify a threat, which is to be both approached and avoided. That is, they move towards and seek out the 'threat' and then run away, often repeatedly. Corsaro suggests that these routines may produce a metaphorical 'safe space' in which children can resolve unaddressed fears and confusions resulting from normal adult-child interactions. As a 'free space', the play house may have provided a material space in which the children could do this. Certainly, approach-avoidance routines in the toddler room were often associated with the play house. In these routines, the threatening agent could be a child (as in the above example), a group of children, an object or a member of staff:

Daniel and Kelsey were in the play house. Max came over and leaned in the window from the outside, kicking his feet in the air. Daniel and Kelsey screamed and ran away to the other side of the house. Max reached after them, trying to grab them. Daniel and Kelsey moved a bit closer to Max who started making gurgling noises, so they ran away again. Kelsey left the house to do something else. Daniel walked over to the window and put his hands on Max's head, trying to push him down. Max ducked down for a few seconds before jumping up making a gurgling noise. Both boys giggled. They moved around to another window and repeated this new routine. Max then went into the house and the boys ran around, sticking their heads out of the windows making various noises. As Daniel stuck his head out of one of the windows, JENNIFER walked past and said, 'Boo!' causing both boys to run away laughing.

The staff often played along in their assigned role, involving themselves in the peer culture.

However, children's activities in the play house were not always condoned by staff. In fact, the staff often described the play house as a 'nightmare' because of the 'nonsense' that went on inside:

Fraser was standing outside the play house. Luke reached out and hit him with a car. Fraser started crying and went over to NUALA who told Luke that he had hurt Fraser and that it wasn't 'nice' to hit him. She also threatened to take him out of the house if he did it again. Mark and Ryan went into the house. After a few minutes Luke came out crying. NUALA told him, 'If you hit and push in the house other people will do it to you'. She then told Ryan and Mark to be 'nice' in the house.

Hitting and pushing were common occurrences in the play house, and there were occasional incidences of biting. As in the above extract, children often attempted to get staff to resolve these disputes for them. In doing so they were effectively working the nursery system against each other. During free play, staff spent much of their time dealing with peer culture conflicts, often fights over toys.

The children also used the play house in their attempts to avoid certain activities. As the staff found it difficult to get inside the 'toddler-sized' play house (particularly Ashley who was pregnant) the children would often attempt to prolong free play by hiding inside:

The children were called over to the music corner for singing and stories. Some children went into the play house instead. ASHLEY told them to come out and join the other children in the music corner. Thomas and Louise came out reluctantly when told but Louise slammed the door as she came out. Kelsey still refused to come out, hiding in the far corner instead. ASHLEY walked away from the house so Kelsey came over to the window but when she saw ASHLEY coming back she ran away again. ASHLEY reached into the house and tried to get Kelsey to come out but she fought against her. Once Kelsey was finally out of the house ASHLEY told her firmly, 'It's not nice to hit the ladies', and sent her over to sit with the other children.

Thus, the play house 'free space' could become, at least temporarily, a sanctuary from adult control; truly a children's space in the toddler room.

Conclusion: Interaction, manipulation and negotiation

As many of the previous examples indicate, the two 'worlds' in the toddler room, the official world organised by adults and the peer culture 'underlife', were not autonomous of one another but are intricately intertwined. The peer culture cannot be understood in isolation from the adult structures within which it emerged. The children's knowledge of the toddler room rules and routine allowed them to create a vibrant peer culture from what might be called its gaps and weaknesses. In response the staff continually reassessed and improvised their styles of control as they attempted to return the toddler room to some semblance of 'order'. As such, the two 'cultures' in the toddler room constantly jostled together:

Charlotte, Sophie, Abbie and Natalie were in the play house being very boisterous. Abbie started screaming and the other children joined in. HEATHER told them not to scream because, 'Screaming gives the ladies a fright'. The girls ignored her and continued screaming, so Heather removed them from the house. SARAH told her to turn the house around so that the children could not get in. Sophie and Natalie went away to play with something else but Charlotte and Abbie were determined to play in the house. Charlotte's attempt to climb in a window was stopped by HEATHER. Blair came over and leaned in one of the windows, Charlotte and Abbie did the same at the other two windows. They started kicking their feet against the house walls, watching each other through the windows. The staff kept moving the children away, sometimes physically, but the children repeatedly came back and others joined in.

This incident took place towards the end of a week when the play house had proved particularly problematic for staff, so they attempted to prevent the children gaining access to the house and regain panoptic control. However, the children were unwilling to give up their free space so they modified their activity to suit the new circumstances. Eventually the children finished their game and moved on to other activities. Sarah, the toddler room manager, often told me about the problems the staff had with the play house and suggested that they were considering extending a sort of surveillance inside it by putting up staff photographs inside the play house to make the children think that they were still being watched.

The previous incident was extremely unusual. Usually the atmosphere in the toddler room was less combative; it was less a 'clash of cultures' than constant manoeuvring. Sharp and colleagues (2000) describe power as 'entangled', neither wholly domination nor resistance but a messy flux of interactions and relations. Thus, the toddler room should not be seen as a battle ground between adult domination and children's resistance; rather the 'worlds' of both adults and children—even here in the toddler room—are intricately and inextricably entangled together. Official and 'underlife' routines were part of day-to-day toddler room life, not simply repetition but a form of social learning through which space and time were continually modified and (re) negotiated. As such, Corsaro notes that peer culture secondary adjustments can have a variety of outcomes (1997). As in Corsaro's study, the toddler room children often attempted to avoid participating in tidy up time with varying levels of success:

At tidy up time Sarah told the children that they should help 'the ladies' tidy up. Louise and Abbie ignored this instruction and continued to sit on the sleep mats reading books. Evan was in the home corner pretending to make dinner, he took his plate over to the small kitchen table and pretended to eat. LORNA asked him to help her to tidy up the kitchen but he just said, 'Dinner', and continued with his play. Amber helped JENNIFER to get the toys from underneath a table and put them away. Abbie put her books away and tried to take out a pram that had just been put aside, Sarah told her to put it back. The children were called over to the music corner to sing with NUALA while the rest of the staff finished tidying up.

While some children complied with the instruction to tidy up, others attempted to evade this duty. Many of these challenges, like Abbie's attempt to play with the pram, were easily circumvented. However, Tom's role play 'excuse' was successful both due to the high value placed on imaginative play by the staff and the constraints of the toddler room routine. Toddler staff did not expect the children to help much at tidy up time but asked them to participate so as to 'train' them to help more in the future. However, as the children usually proved to be something of a hindrance they were entertained in the music corner while staff finished tidying up and set up the next activity.

Corsaro described other possible outcomes. Sometimes a secondary adjustment could actually reinforce the broken rule:¹⁴

At group time Martin didn't want to sit at the table with the rest of the Giraffes. NUALA tried to stop him wandering off by cuddling him on her knee but he struggled. She decided to let him go but continued watching him as she got the group activity underway. As Martin was still 'settling in' to the toddler room the staff were more lenient with him than with the more established children. Martin went over to storybook corner where LORNA was making toast for snack time. After being told by NUALA to leave LORNA alone, he walked away but quickly went back to play with the milk cartons. After a while he wandered over towards the music corner, tripped over his feet, fell and hit his head on a bench. He screamed and NUALA tried to comfort him with cuddles and a cold compress.

By wandering about when he should have been sitting with the rest of his group, Martin was breaking the rules. If he had stayed at the table he would not have fallen and hurt himself so his injury illustrated the need to abide by the rules to all the children. Corsaro noted a final

¹⁴ In the toddler room rules were generally implicit, coded into the routine and classifications of space. However, certain rules, such as the rules against running in the nursery or against hitting and biting, were made more explicit. Even then they were obscured behind concerns for children's safety. Children were told not to run because they might fall and hurt themselves and not to bite or hit because it hurts other children. If discipline is embodied in the classroom layout and the curriculum, it is possible for nurseries to function with a single general rule—masked as a concern for children's well-being—that no-one must hurt themselves or others (Leatzow *et al.*, 1983).

possibility whereby staff adapt their own rules to accommodate an emerging situation. In the toddler room this was usually linked to the perception of the need to promote 'good quality play', often collective imaginative play:

NUALA was sitting on a bench in the music corner watching the children during free play. Liam, Charlotte, Lewis and Martin came over and climbed on the empty book bench. There are four squares in the top of the book bench for putting books that are just big enough for a toddler to sit in. Liam sat in one of the squares and pretended to drive a car. Instead of stopping them, NUALA saw this as an opportunity for imaginative play, and said, 'Oh, look at you Liam, driving your car!' She encouraged the other children to sit in a box and 'drive' the car too, discussing the play with them as they did so.

At times staff not only allowed a transgressive activity to continue but created, and enforced, a new set of rules to ensure its smooth running:

NUALA was trying to read to some children in storybook corner but the children were more interested in crawling under a small red table. She decided to abandon the story and organize what the children were doing instead, encouraging the children to take turns and imposing a one-way system. Charlotte noticed the game and joined in. On his turn, Max decided to lie down under the table disrupting the game. NUALA warned him that she would move the table unless he moved so he started crawling again. Abbie and Liam began to push in front of each other but NUALA stopped them explaining, 'It's not nice to push'.

In effect, Nuala was making a secondary adjustment to her own rules (in that they are made and enforced by staff). In doing so she was teaching the children that all rules are to some extent negotiable (Corsaro, 1997).

In the course of social relations and routines in the toddler room, space and time are continually manipulated and negotiated to varying degrees. This is linked to the nature of the space in the toddler room. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) describe two different kinds of space: smooth space, which is non-hierarchical, folded, free and 'nomadic'; and striated space, which is sedentary, hierarchical, over-determined and Euclidean. It may, at first, seem that adults create striated spaces in that they have clear rules, routines and structures, while the more chaotic spaces created by children are smooth. However, Deleuze and Guattari explain that neither smooth nor striated space can exist in isolation; each is subverted and tainted by the other; they are entangled together. Thus, space exists only as relations of smoothing and striation. That is not to say that children have a completely smoothing effect, nor that adults produce purely striated spaces to be smoothed by children. Jones (2000) notes that children produce differently striated spaces, coded as scary, fun, or more or less likely to get told off. However, no striations are permanent, they alter and shift as space is (re)used and (re)negotiated; smoothed and (re)striated. The various striations created by the official toddler room routine with its functional sites and spatial classifications are reflected in the Euclidean spaces suggested by Figures 2-17. However, space is also smoothed (to some extent) in the relaxed classifications of free play and the free space of the play house. Peer culture routines and staff adaptations to them smooth out the officially striated spaces but create new, temporary striations of their own. In this way, toddler room space is dynamic, constantly smoothed and (re)striated as routines are continually adapted by both adults and children to suit emerging circumstances. Thus, the entangled worlds of adults and children in the toddler room can be understood as continually manoeuvring around and modifying each other. This cannot easily be captured in diagrams or text but I have attempted to describe something of these day-to-day (re)negotiations in my field diary extracts.

As such, the toddler room can be described as a polymorphic space (Jones, 2000) in that relations of smoothing and striation were able to circulate to some degree. Jones argues that polymorphic spaces are particularly important in contemporary childhoods, as children have access to fewer 'wild spaces' outside of adult control than they had in the past. However, the institutional and (sometimes) commercial character of childcare institutions does not necessarily mean that childhood opportunism and imagination will be replaced by completely formalised and ordered childhoods. Such a notion would suggest that children have no ability to act in or modify the world. In the toddler room young children were able to operate within adult structures, asserting some control over and negotiating their own uses of childcare space. As such, toddlers were full participants in nursery life, not merely pre-social objects of care.

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